

## NEW BOOKS.

## Married and Back in Altruria.

That traveller from a happy land, Mr. William Dean Howells' Altrurian, is heard from newly, by the favor of his distinguished proprietor and friend, in the considerable volume now very agreeably before us, "Through the Eye of the Needle" (Harper & Bros.). It was so long ago as 1893 that the Altrurian made his visit to America, but, of course, he is not forgotten. We remember very well how keen and entertaining his observation was and how it took note, among other things, of the use by Americans of "individual" dishes for vegetables at dinner, and of the employment of these, or of dishes similar, at other times, for bathtubs for canary birds. Ever since so often as we have heard a canary bird venting his huge joy in song, we have thought of the Altrurian, provided to encourage and assist the little creature in cheerfulness, and we have thought of the Altrurian pursuing his American studies.

In the new book we have the Altrurian's letters, written home during his sojourn here, and we have letters from Altruria written by an American lady whose felicity it was to marry the Altrurian and to accompany him thither. In the letters of the first group it is proved abundantly and in the letters of the second group it is proved that our visitor from afar (immensely afar, as even optimists must think) regarded us with a generous and kindly if not exactly hopeful eye. With a humor that tempers the severity of the facts, he sets forth his observations of life in New York. The results of his "study of the plutocratic mind" may be found here. It is put down in his letters that New Yorkers used to live in private houses, boarding houses or hotels, but that great numbers of them now live in "apartments." The various housing of people in apartments is described. The complicated and tremendous noise that pervades New York was naturally remarked by the Altrurian. "People are born and married and live and die in the midst of an uproar so frantic that you would think they would go mad of it," he records. He speaks of apartments along the lines of the elevated railroads. "In health it is bad enough," he says, "but in sickness it must be horrible beyond all parallel. Imagine a mother with a dying child in such a place; or a wife bending over the pillow of her husband to catch the last faint whisper of farewell as a train of five or six cars goes roaring by the open window! What horror! What profanation!"

From these distressing and truthful representations (though it may be noted that a persistent place in as bad as a railroad for the nerves) it is agreeable to proceed with the Altrurian to Mrs. Makely's flat, situated in one of the better streets and commanding a rent perhaps as large as the salaries of two or three college presidents. There is a good deal about the Makelys and their domestic life. Many matters of living interest to New Yorkers are touched upon in the recorded conversations between the Altrurian and these pleasant people—servants, storage, wages, the cooking at clubs, the regular and finished attentions received by the dwellers in flats from the milkman, the iceman, the butcher's man, the grocer's man—all the army of faithful men who bring things to the kitchen. Several chapters are devoted by the Altrurian to the review of a Thanksgiving dinner to which he was invited by the Makelys. He was overwhelmed by the size of it, and no reader will be likely to think that it was not ample. It included soup, fish and sliced cucumbers, sweetbreads and green peas, beef tenderloin, and mushrooms, stewed terrapin, stuffed peppers, radishes, olives, celery and roasted almonds, water ice flavored with rum. "A roast turkey that looked as large as an ostrich," canvas-back ducks, cranberry sauce and current jelly, salad, ice cream, fruit, cheese, different kinds of champagne, liquors, and mixed wines in a perpetual flow from the beginning on. In what may be regarded as mercy the pumpkin pie was left out.

It was at this gigantic dinner that the Altrurian met Mrs. Strange. She was charming, with gray eyes and teeth not too regular. "Her mouth was very sweet, whether she laughed or sat gravely silent." She was a young widow. Eveleth Strange, her very agreeable whole name was. She was possessed by a gentle melancholy because she was rich. Sometimes her thoughts upon this matter were disturbing. Speaking of her money she once said: "I have given and given, but there seems some evil spell on the principal that guards it from encroachment, so that it remains the same, and, if I do not watch, the interest grows in the bank, with that frightful lead money seems to grow in the grave." Surely that thought was unpleasant enough. It did not surprise us that her mother, hearing, should have murmured, "Eveleth!" Of her beautiful and costly house, provided for her by her husband, in which "every fixture, every movable, was an artistic masterpiece," in which the carpets were worth thousands and the pictures tens of thousands, Eveleth said: "After it was all done, we neither of us liked it, and when he died I felt as if he had left me in a tomb here." The reader will early apprehend of Eveleth that she was fitted by nature for Altruria. There was some momentary confusion and threat of incompatibility over United States bonds and other material properties after she and the Altrurian were engaged. Eveleth proposed to him that he should take to him "I want to show people that we are just as practical as anybody," she said, with a laugh and a kiss; "and if they can know that I have left my money in United States bonds they'll respect us. Don't you see? We can come back and preach and teach Altrurianism, and as long as we pay our way nobody will have a right to say a word. Why, Tolstoi himself doesn't destroy his money, though he wants other people to do it. His wife keeps it and supports the family. You agree to do it." This was a lighter view of money than her other view that we have noted—lighter at least in its expression, and far more cheerful. The Altrurian protested regarding Tolstoi's keeping of his money. "He doesn't do it willingly," he said. "No," said Eveleth, "and we won't." Her husband pleased us. But of course the Altrurian had to batten his heart against her and against the bonds.

It seems to us plain that detail is not to be so readily grasped in Altruria as it is in New York. The Altrurian writing here must have had advantages that could not be commanded by Eveleth writing from Altruria. Still her letters afford us a considerable understanding of that happy country. When she and her new husband arrived at the Altrurian shore three boats decorated with flowers and rowed by girls came out after them. Here is the exact business as described by Eveleth: "When they caught sight of us, leaning over the side, and Aristides (the Altrurian) lifted his hat and waved it to them, they all stood their oars upright and burst into a kind of welcome song. I had been dreading one of those stupid, bawling salutes of ten or twenty guns, and you can imagine what a relief it was. They were great, splendid creatures, as tall as our millionaires' tallest daughters, and as strong looking as any

of our college girl athletes; and when we got down over the ship's side, and Aristides said a few words of introduction for my mother and me, as we stepped into the largest of the boats, I thought they would crush me, catching me in their strong, brown arms and kissing me on each cheek; they never kiss on the mouth in Altruria. The girls in the other boats kissed their hands to mother and me and shouted to Aristides, and then, when our boat set out for the shore, they got on each side of us and sang songs as they pulled even stroke with our crew. Delightful enough. No custom house, no quarantine doctor, no slow warping in by puffing and straining tugs. Male Altrurians rowed out after the baggage.

Six girls carried Eveleth's mother up to the Regio guest house in a litter furnished with soft cushions and lilac curtains. There were no wheeled conveyances. Aristides went immediately before a convention and described America. "Tales of laughter were excited by some of the things he told. Eveleth assumed the Altrurian dress for females, which is classical, comfortable and beautiful. Her feet grew one-tenth larger in a single month after she had taken to sandals. When she wrote she had hope that they would achieve soon the true classical proportions. Her old clothes, or at least her American clothes, were hung up in a museum. The eating in Altruria was not much of a reminder of Mrs. Makely's Thanksgiving dinner. It consisted largely of mushrooms, which there take the place of meat. Wearing of mushrooms, Eveleth tried once to have chicken. Nobody in Altruria could be persuaded to kill a chicken. So Aristides procured a live one and he and she cut off its head. Vain as well as cruel undertaking. Eveleth writes: "Did you ever see a chicken have its head cut off, and how hideously it behaves? It made us both wish we were dead." They buried it in a flower garden and went back to mushrooms. It is recorded by Eveleth a little further along: "Since my experience with that pullet I go meekly mushrooming in the fields and pastures; and when I have set the mushrooms stewing over an open fire Aristides makes the coffee and in a little while we have a banquet fit for kings. . . . There is always water."

Weddings, christenings and funerals are touched upon in the letters. The Altrurian language is happily marked by simple sounds and simple spelling. The cities of Altruria "are delightful; clean, airy, quiet, with the most beautiful architecture, mostly classic and mostly marble, with rivers through them and round them, and every real convenience, but not a dash of artificial convenience, as with us, where the streets are noiseless trolleys." When you go shopping you can get all that you want or at least all that you ought to have, for nothing. There is a highway running across the whole Altrurian continent that is lined on both sides with stately white pillars inscribed with the names of dead Altrurians who were great poets, novelists, historians, men of science, composers, inventors, doctors, singers, orators, warriors or farmers. Can the reader imagine anything more inspiring and desirable? Anything except, perhaps, the mushrooms and the abundant water? Possibly we should add the simple spelling. But we must tear ourselves from the halcyon and bewildering picture.

## A Long Gorky Socialist Story.

Maxim Gorky's story entitled "Mother" (D. Appleton & Co.) tells of the efforts of a group of Russian Socialists to improve and elevate themselves and to fire and arouse their brothers, the laboring people. It opens with a melancholy sketch of life in a factory village. There is a frontispiece picture, well calculated to bring the reader's heart, illustrating that passage in the text which says of the procession of workers going to the factory in the morning, "The sombre faces they hastened forward like frightened roaches, their muscles stiff from insufficient sleep. In the chill morning twilight they walked through the narrow unpaved street to the tall stone cage that waited for them with cold assurance, illuminating their muddy road with scores of greasy, yellow, square eyes. The mud plashed under their feet as if in mocking commiseration. Hoarse exclamations of sleepy voices were heard; irritated, peevish, abusive language rent the air with malice; and, to welcome the people, deafening sounds floated about—the heavy whirr of machinery, the dissatisfied snort of steam. Stern and sombre the black chimneys stretched their huge, thick stacks high above the village."

We are prepared, of course, to think anything of Russia, but how much of that picture is due strictly to the artist? Is due to the state of his mind and the inclination and habit of his hand? The unhappy people in this tale talk constantly of the happy people in France. But Zola, describing the sorrows of labor in France, drew pictures very much like this. He heaped the same distressing adjectives together. His mud, his windows, his chimneys, his machinery, his steam, were just as mocking, greasy, black, whirling, snorting and dissatisfied as Mr. Gorky's. Every novel of socialism that we remember calls a factory a cage. Surely America is not so bad socially and economically as Russia, but "The Jungle" throbs hard with the same profound gutters, if not exactly the same cadences and flights and blows of rhetoric, that we find here. It is Mr. Gorky's misfortune that we have been used to stomach tones, and that now, when it may well be there is very good occasion for them, they do not affect us as they did once upon a time.

Nevertheless we feel that we may reasonably shudder and we do shudder at the account here of Michael Vlasov, father of the hero of the tale. Vlasov was the strongest man in the village. He beat everybody. Anybody offering to beat him failed in the very beginning through fright. He was unpleasantly brusque, like a ravening soldier that he remember in one of this author's most disagreeable stories. We read of him: "When Vlasov found himself threatened with attack he caught a stone in his hand, or a piece of wood or iron, and spreading out his legs stood in silence waiting for the enemy. His face overgrown with a dark beard from his eyes to his neck, and his hands thickly covered with woolly hair, inspired everybody with fear. People were especially afraid of his eyes. Small and keen, they seemed to bore through a man like steel gimlets, and every one who met their gaze felt he was confronting a beast, a savage power, inaccessible to fear, ready to strike unmercifully. Well, thick with dirty vermin!" he said gruffly. His coarse yellow teeth glistened terribly through the thick hair on his face. The men walked off uttering coward abuse. "D'ye vermin!" he snapped at them, and his eyes gleamed with a smile sharp as an awl. Then holding his head in an attitude of direct challenge, with a short thick pipe between his teeth, he walked behind them and now and then called out: "Well, who wants death?" No one wanted it.

This wicked man died in a horrible manner, doubtless of drink and his temper. In the unsparring words of the story: "When he died he died hard. For five days, turned all black, he rolled in his bed, gnashing

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his teeth, his eyes tightly closed. Sometimes he would say to his wife: 'Give me arsenic. Poison me.' When he had succumbed people said of him: 'He didn't die; he rotted away like a beast.' In our opinion this older Vlasov, utterly wicked and objectionable, though he is, is the most interesting character in the book. The son Pavel and his companion Socialists suffer in comparison. He takes the shine out of them, if we may speak cordially and without ceremonial fear. It was wrong, from an artistic point of view, to turn on this glare, and then to exhibit those rushlights. Pavel and his group soon come to be monotonous and discouraging. The story fills itself up with dialogues, speeches and sermons setting forth or offering to set forth the hazy Socialist idea. The reader smothered in the melancholy ruck. He perishes in the thick and clinging sentiment. He feels as if he were in the middle of a black bad pudding. If a black bad pudding were in the middle of him he could not feel worse. Every Socialist drinks, as we remember, and only one, a lady, uses tobacco. The whole lot of them spend hours in thinking lovingly of the working people in France, Italy, Germany and other foreign countries. Their hearts are forever melting with unselfish love. Wax in the sun does not run softer. We have said that no Socialist in the book drinks. The samovar is always purring. Everybody is full of sentiment and tea.

There is some action. Pavel tries to organize a strike. He carries a red banner. There are certain police activities. The title of the book refers to Pavel's mother. She develops unsuspected powers in oratory. She addresses the people and distributes secret literature. The story ends in a climax that is not quite clear. It is said at the last, "There was a rattle in her throat," but we cannot tell whether they really killed her. Doubtless the uncertainty at the end signifies the conditions in Russia at this time.

## Short Stories and Other Fiction.

If the reader will forgive the introductory cryptic chapter of Mr. Robert W. Chambers' "The Tree of Heaven" (Appletons) and will read the following nine for what they are, namely, separate and unconnected short stories, he will get a lot of enjoyment. They are all well told and thoroughly interesting. They can be read, too, with pleasure at one sitting, which is a good deal

of a feat on the part of the author, for they all turn on a single point, the actual declaration of love. Some deal with the supernatural, some are humorous, and there is skillful use of the telephone, but the variations on a theme that is eternal are always artistic. The stories, we fancy, will be even more attractive when read aloud. The one exception is the delirium of rug fever with which the book opens, and the consequent arrangement of the other stories in numbered chapters, which only serve to mystify the reader.

It is needless to expatiate on the merits of Mr. W. W. Jacobs' short stories. Those who know him will know just what to expect and those who do not will find it to their advantage to become acquainted with him as soon as possible. In the dozen tales contained in "Short Stories" (Charles Scribner's Sons) he shows that the stream of humor is flowing as freshly as ever. He is at his best when describing the incidents of longshore seamanish, but there is absurdity enough in his village tales to satisfy the reader. The final story in the volume takes its place beside "Brugglesmith" as an epic of intoxication.

A somewhat limited audience, though it may include the majority of readers of fiction, is appealed to by Mr. Winfield Scott Moody in "The Pickwick Ladies and Other Collector's Stories" (Charles Scribner's Sons). The half dozen tales included all turn on the chase after some piece of brio-a-brac and all employ the collector's peculiar vocabulary. They are full of good humor and human nature, all the same, and engage the reader's sympathy as well as his sense of fun. In one respect the stories show a marked contrast to a good deal of present day fiction; the people described have distinction and good manners.

The seamy side of the lowest layer of the theatrical profession is described with extraordinary knowledge by Helen Green in "At the Actor's Boarding Table" (Brentano's).

A painful little story of the harm done by spiritualistic imposture will be found in Florence Morse Kingsley's "Balm in Gilead" (Funk and Wagnalls Company). The pathetic part is real enough to make the efforts at humor jar.

The theory that every man has at least one story in him seems to be proved by Mr. Charles Richardson's "Tales of a Warrior" (The Neale Publishing Company, New York). The greater number of the sketches, though clearly founded on personal ex-

Continued on Eighth Page.

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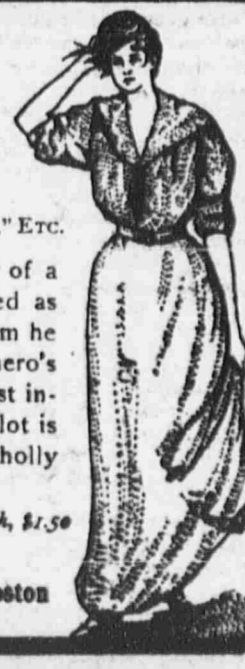
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